

## **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest – 2002**

### **Second Prize: Lynn Phan**

#### **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. - A Prominent Leader**

"Freedom at last! Let freedom ring!" These were the words of Dr. Martin Luther King! Again, it's another year, which means another stack of "Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. essays" to go through. I could just picture the reluctance in your eyes, "not again!" moves through your head. But believe me, a Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. essay is truly an essay worth writing (in my opinion at least). Through his years of existence, he contributed so much to the human race and America's society. Without the work he has done, the freedom he believed in, the dignity he carried, and the rights he believes in, our diverse lifestyles would not be the same today. Because of him, most people finally realize that all men are created equal, therefore receiving equal freedom and rights. People were either "chocolate or vanilla" and it wasn't bad to be different. White people weren't his evil enemies; it was segregation itself that was evil.

On humid summer day, August 28, 1963, to be exact, 200,000 civil right's supporters crowded in Washington, D.C. to hear Dr. King's famous speech:

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal' ...I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

These words didn't only change you, and it didn't only change me. It didn't just alter the life of the little boy down the block, or your monotonous teacher at school or even your grandma. It didn't only change the people on your street, at school, city, or state, let alone the nation itself. But indeed it did change the world. Passing through the seven seas and cascading into the 7 continents, these words echoed through the earth, changing it forever.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born on January 15, 1929 to Martin Luther King Sr. and Alberta Williams King. Named after a 16th century religious leader who had brought many changes into the church and had once said, "To go against your conscience--your sense of right and wrong--is neither safe nor right", Martin lived up to his name. The legacy of Martin Luther King's theory of peace and justice didn't start with the infamous speech. The legacy started at his birth and continued through his years of life. As a child, Martin was discouraged because of the fact that he wasn't allowed to play with his white friends. Segregation was everywhere and people weren't free, which started the reason why he stood up for his rights as well as other people's rights.

He was a black man that achieved many things despite the segregation, including excelling in the local segregated schools, enrolling at Morehouse College at the age of 15 and graduating a bachelor's degree in sociology in 1948, graduating with honors from Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania in 1951, and earning a doctoral degree in theology from Boston University in 1955. He admired many black men: track

star Jesse Owens, educator Booker T. Washington, scientist George Washington Carver, and singer Paul Robeson. He liked the ways of Mohandas Ghandi, fighting in a non-violent, peaceful manner. In 1953, Martin married Coretta Scott, a woman who loved and supported him, and they had 4 children. As you can see, his life (so far) was fascinating.

But, the fascination wouldn't end there, good or bad. In the early 1950's blacks, Martin being one of them, decided to boycott the buses in order to receive better treatment. In 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested and taken to jail while refusing to give up her bus seat to a white passenger after a long day at work. This encouraged the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to boycott furthermore. King was chosen to be president of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), who organized the Montgomery Boycott for his great social public-speaking skills. The Montgomery Boycott lasted for over a year. In 1956, an attorney for MIA filed a lawsuit because of Montgomery's segregated seating. The federal court was in favor of the MIA, and soon, the buses were desegregated. After this event, King wrote *Stride Toward Freedom*, a memoir during the days of the bus boycott.

Dr. King's home was bombed, but he still advocated in brotherhood and had spirit, impressing many whites outside of the south. All that he did made Martin Luther King a national figure.

As if being a national figure wasn't enough for the young man, he continued to fight for FREEDOM. In 1957, he helped found and was president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) an organization of black churches and ministers whose main goal was to overcome racial segregation and fight for freedom for all. He fund-raised for the organization by preaching in northern churches. The SCLC also organized a number of protests.

As you can see, Martin Luther King was an avid activist in the Civil Rights Movement. He supported with his powerful speeches. Many people admired him and chose him as their leader in organizations such as NAACP, MIA, and SCLC. Marches were organized; protest and boycotts took place, peacefully of course. In 1964, King also won the Nobel Peace Prize as a result of King's effectiveness as a leader of the American civil rights movement and for peace.

Alas, on April 4, 1968 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated by a sniper's fatal gunshot wound. He may be physically dead, but his words and his legacy never will and the work he had done in the Civil Rights Movement will never be forgotten. They shall remain in our hearts, our souls, and our minds, forevermore, as we continue to stride toward freedom today and always.

#### Bibliography

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